

# Speed Limits

## THE FACTS

### Setting a Speed Limit

The procedures for setting speed limits are based on the following traffic law principles:

- The majority of motorists drive in a safe and reasonable manner;
- The normally careful and competent actions of a reasonable person should be considered legal;
- Laws are established for the protection of the public and the regulation of unreasonable behavior of a few individuals;
- Laws can't be effectively enforced without the consent and voluntary compliance of the majority.

Experience has shown that setting a speed limit at the “85th percentile speed” (the speed not exceeded by 85% of the drivers) generally reflects the behavior of the majority of drivers and results in a safe and reasonable speed limit.

Engineering studies to determine the proper speed limit include a statistical analysis of actual travel speeds and an analysis of the crash history. Other roadway conditions considered include road surface and shoulder conditions, grade, curvature, sight distance, and roadside development.

### Misconceptions about Speed Limits

The public often asks for lower speed limits in response to highway safety concerns. In many cases, the posting of a lower speed limit on a section of highway is an appropriate measure to alert drivers of a change in road conditions, or of hazards that may not be readily apparent.



However, there are misconceptions that posting a lower speed limit will automatically decrease the speed of traffic, reduce crashes, and increase safety. Setting an unrealistically low speed limit that is not appropriate for road conditions generally has no effect on vehicle speeds or safety. This has been demonstrated in numerous “before and after” research studies of speed limits changes.

The majority of drivers tend to drive a speed that their experience indicates is safe for the road conditions.

An unrealistic speed limit may be disregarded and result in disrespect for the law by normally law-abiding drivers. Additionally, widely varying speeds are unsafe.

### To Learn More

UDOT is committed to being responsive to public concerns and questions. If you'd like additional information about speed limits, please contact us at 801-965-4000 or contact a project representative with whom you've been working.

